



United States  
Department of  
Agriculture

Service Center  
Initiative  
(SCI)

# Guide for Developing Service Center Initiative Web Pages

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**Abstract:** This Guide establishes guidelines for developing Service Center Initiative web pages.

**Keywords:** standard, website, web pages, guide

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## Introduction

(This introduction is not part of SCI Gd 002-01 Guide for Developing Service Center Initiative Web Pages.)

This document establishes guidelines for creating web pages for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Service Center Initiative (SCI) websites. The guidelines presented within were discussed and adopted as draft by the Sponsors and Stewards of the SCI web pages at the workshop held on April 17, 1999 in Beltsville, Maryland. The purpose for implementing these guidelines is that all SCI web pages will have a common “look and feel” so users will quickly become comfortable navigating through the pages. This consistency will also keep users from having to hunt for similar features on the different pages, and will make USDA ownership of the pages immediately apparent.

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# GUIDE FOR DEVELOPING SERVICE CENTER INITIATIVE WEB PAGES

## 1. Overview

### 1.1. Scope

This document establishes guidelines for creating web pages for the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Service Center Initiative (SCI) websites. The overarching assumption of this document is that, at some future point, some or all of the guidelines discussed herein will be overridden or superseded by guidelines or standards established by the Electronic Access Initiative (EAI).

### 1.2. Purpose

The purpose of the Guide for Developing Service Center Initiative Web Pages is that all SCI web pages conform to a common format and structure so users will quickly become comfortable navigating through the pages. This consistency will also keep users from having to hunt for similar features on the different pages, and will make USDA ownership of the pages immediately apparent.

Reference to specific products is given for the convenience of users of this standard and does not constitute an endorsement by the SCI of these products.

### 1.3. Definitions

For the purposes of this guide, the following terms and definitions apply:

application pages	Pages containing some sort of web-enabled database interface, advanced search capability, or some other function that involves the use of logic code.
content pages	Pages displaying information about the subject of a page.
menu pages	Pages presenting the user with options for navigating the website. An example of a menu page would be <a href="http://www.sci.usda.gov/sci">http://www.sci.usda.gov/sci</a> .

Application pages should generally be less strictly bound to standards due to the special nature of their functions. Content and menu pages, being generally more static, shall be expected to adhere more closely to the guidelines.

### 1.4. Acronyms and abbreviations

ADA	Americans with Disabilities Act
ALT	Alternative Text tag
ASP	Active Server Page
DHTML	Dynamic Hypertext Markup Language

IBM	International Business Machines
EAI	Electronic Access Initiative
HTML	Hypertext Markup Language
IP	Internet Protocol
NFAC	National Food and Agriculture Council
PC	Personal Computer
PMS	Pantone Matching System
SCI	Service Center Initiative
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

## **2. Roles and responsibilities**

There are three roles in the management of the web pages. These are sponsor, steward, and webmaster. The exact duties of each of these roles are not completely defined, although some broad guidelines are as follows:

- *Sponsors* are responsible for page content. The sponsors for each component site should decide which aspects of this usage data they wish to analyze, and configure their report requests accordingly.
- *Stewards* (or their designees) are responsible for site/page design and page content currency; in addition, all stewards should know the physical location(s) of the server(s) hosting their websites.
- *Webmasters*, called contacts on the page, are responsible for the technical aspects of installing, updating, deleting, and maintaining website contents. Webmasters should assist stewards in the production of site maps that will be published for each site. The Webmaster should also be responsible for monitoring site usage statistics using tools like WebTrends® or SiteServer®.

When the specific roles and responsibilities are defined, they will be posted on the SCI Web Integration website.

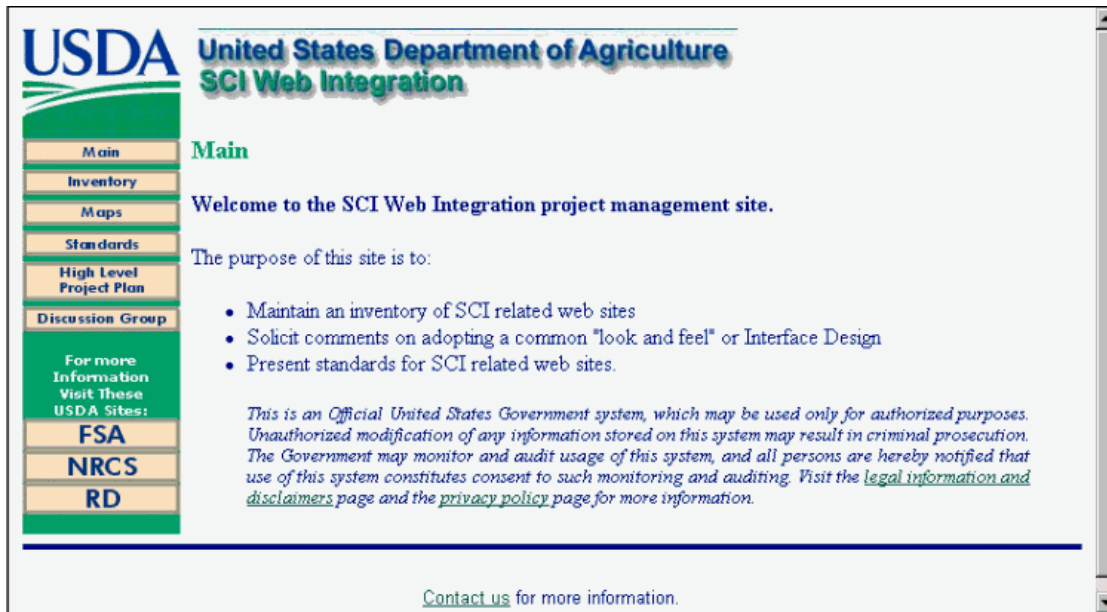
## **3. Standards**

Guidelines for categories in web development are presented in the following order:

- Layout
- Navigation
- Warnings and disclaimers
- Email and feedback
- Minimal browser criteria
- Readability
- Content
- Page submission
- Security

### 3.1. Layout

Content and menu pages should follow the general layout shown in Figure 1.



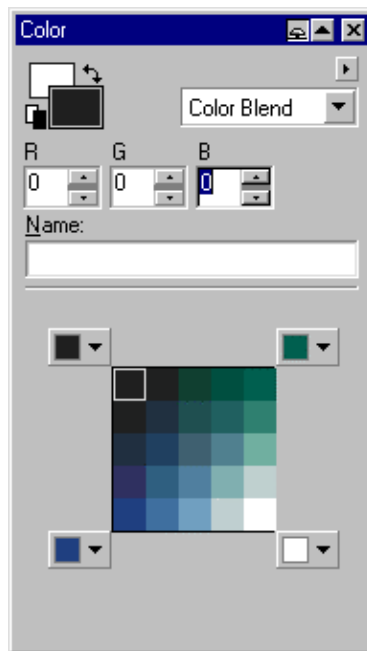
**Figure 1—Example of a SCI web page**

The page should be divided into the following areas:

- A navigation bar along the left side of the page, 113 pixels wide, flush to the left of the screen, extending to the top of the warning/disclaimer area.
- The USDA logo in the upper left corner, image-mapped to the USDA home page [www.usda.gov](http://www.usda.gov), 113 pixels wide and 77 pixels high, aligned left-right with the navigation bar.
- A banner area across the top of the page, up to 510 pixels wide and no more than 77 pixels high, aligned top-bottom with the USDA logo.
- A feedback and warning/disclaimer area at the bottom of the page.
- A content pane in the center and right of the page, and which should be the focus of the page.

Menu pages should not have to strictly adhere to this template, but should follow its layout principles whenever possible. Frames are to be avoided when laying out the page. All graphics and tables should be fully visible at lower resolutions without left-right scrolling.

A standard color palette, using web-compliant colors based around USDA green and USDA blue, should be established and adhered to. For reference purposes, these colors are defined in the Pantone Matching System (PMS) and translated into other common color definition schemes.



USDA blue = PMS 288 (dark purple),  
 which equates to:  
 CMYK: 100, 65, 0, 30  
 RGB: 0, 51, 127  
 HTML triplet #00317f  
 CMY: 255, 204, 128  
 HSB: 216, 100, 49

USDA green = PMS 347 (dark green),  
 which equates to:  
 CMYK = 73, 9, 77, 0  
 RGB: 0, 160, 104  
 HTML triplet #00a068  
 CMY: 255, 95, 151  
 HSB: 159, 100, 63

**Figure 2—Sample color palette**

A sample palette based on the two official USDA colors is shown in Figure 2. Developers are encouraged to use something similar to provide a mix between standardization and creativity. Fairly wide latitude towards creativity and individuality will be allowed in the banner header at the top of each page. These banners may include hyperlinks or image maps.

### 3.2. Navigation

Common navigation links should appear in the vertical navigation bar on the left side of the page. This bar should always include a link back to the component home page.

On component home pages, the navigation bar should include a link to a site map of the component website. This map should consist of an image mapped graphic, preferably, or a table of contents style list. The map should be an overall look at the site, showing the upper level structure. The pages shown on the map should be linked to the actual page.

The number of links on a page should be limited to 10 or less; the industry standard is five to nine. Only the first reference in a body of text to an agency should be hyperlinked. Exceptions to this standard would include a resource page that provided a list of links, the site map or a search result page.

The webmaster for the SCI Web Integration website should establish a directory structure for the main National Food and Agriculture Council (NFAC) site and publish this site map so that the Webmasters for the component sites can know where to publish their files.



### 3.3. Warnings and disclaimers

A link to a copy of the USDA Service Center's standard Legal Information and Disclaimers page (<http://www.sci.usda.gov/sci/eeo.htm>) and a link to the private policy page (<http://www.usda.gov/news/privacy.htm>) shall be included at every logical entry point into a component website. This includes, but is not limited to, the component home page. The following standard Federal disclaimer should appear on every component home page, as well as on the SCI Website home page:

*This is an Official United States Government system, which may be used only for authorized purposes. Unauthorized modification of any information stored on this system may result in criminal prosecution. The Government may monitor and audit usage of this system, and all persons are hereby notified that use of this system constitutes consent to such monitoring and auditing. Visit the [legal information and disclaimers](#) page and the [privacy policy](#) page for more information.*

Links to commercial websites should be avoided, as this requires a series of procedures ending with a grant of waiver. As such, links to free browser upgrades or to freeware such as Adobe Acrobat Reader® are prohibited. However, it is acceptable to announce to the reader that accessing content may require such an application.

### 3.4. Email and feedback

Eventually, a standard SCI-wide feedback application should be fielded as a result of the Electronic Access Initiative (EAI) project. In the meantime, certain guidelines should be adhered to in providing feedback capability from all appropriate SCI website pages. Note that there should be pages for which the addition of a feedback address is not necessary or appropriate.

All feedback addresses should be in the form of "[Contact us](#) for more information." These addresses should be aliased to the email address of the steward (or steward's designee) so that the actual email addresses of individuals do not appear to the reader. This will ensure that transition from one webmaster or steward to another is not apparent to the public. Other mail links should be included where necessary, such as a link to the content owner.

Public commentary forums, such as Allaire's Forums®, shall be established where appropriate and desirable. Other forms of asynchronous communications may be used. Any forum so established should have a designated reviewer who can remove or annotate unofficial or erroneous information. In addition a centralized help desk should be responsible to facilitate response times and accountability for repairing bugs, broken links, missing pages, etc.

### **3.5. Minimal browser criteria**

All pages shall be constructed so as to support level 3.0 and above web browsers, as these constitute over 95% of browsers in use by the general public as of the publication of these standards.

Hypertext Markup Language (HTML) 3.2 should be the standard language used to develop pages. HTML 4.0 can be used where appropriate and may replace 3.2 as the standard in the near future. Other language variants such as Dynamic Hypertext Markup Language (DHTML) shall not be used. However, whether a page is designed using Cold Fusion® or Active Server Page (ASP)® (to use two examples) is up to the individual developer.

### **3.6. Readability**

Text should be kept to an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level wherever possible. This does not apply to quotes from official documents, disclaimers, etc.

The HTML for each page should be coded so as to provide font alternatives. These alternatives should include at least one serif font and one sans serif font, and the alternatives should be chosen so that the loaded page should look as similar as possible across all browsers and installed font sets. A standard font will be named at a later date. In any case, the font(s) used shall be eight (8) points or larger.

In conjunction with the preceding paragraph, all pages shall function equally well and look roughly the same regardless of the development platform. In other words, pages designed on a Macintosh® should look and perform roughly the same regardless of whether they are viewed on a Macintosh or International Business Machine (IBM) personal computer (PC), and regardless of the browser being used.

Pages should be designed and laid out for display at 800 x 600-screen resolution. This again constrains the width of tables, graphics, and other content so that users will not have to scroll left and right to view the lateral content of a page. Long pages that require a lot of vertical scrolling are to be avoided, as this reduces readability.

Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) standards shall be adhered to, so whenever possible any pages included in the SCI website shall offer text-only alternatives. Also, the background color for pages should generally be plain white in order to conform to ADA standards. Some resources for ADA-compatible web page design (as well as simple good-form design) can be found at:

[http://www.microsoft.com/enable/dev/web\\_intro.htm](http://www.microsoft.com/enable/dev/web_intro.htm)

<http://www.w3.org/TR/WAI-WEBCONTENT/>

<http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/dmd/access/testver1.htm>

### 3.7. Content

The USDA and SCI shall be identified on every page, usually through the use of sanctioned logos. Using Java and Java applets shall be allowed, but a disclaimer announcing the use of Java shall be included on every page on which it is used. In general, Java may be used on application pages, but not on menu or content pages. Official guidance for use and placement of the USDA logo can be found at [http://www.usda.gov/agency/oc/design/Resources/downloads/pdf\\_forms/VisualManGuides/SymbolGd.pdf](http://www.usda.gov/agency/oc/design/Resources/downloads/pdf_forms/VisualManGuides/SymbolGd.pdf).

Other useful document creation information can be found at <http://www.usda.gov/agency/oc/design/>.

Links to these sites should be placed on the SCI Web Integration home page. The standard size for content pages should be less than 50-60k, and should be in HTML only (per earlier discussion). Application pages or pages with media content (video, audio, animation, etc.) should be limited to 200k, but obviously such pages should be implemented sparingly. In particular, streaming audio and video should be strictly avoided because of their high bandwidth requirements. Where large graphics are used, display the file size in an HTML alternative text (ALT) tag ahead of time, or provide a clickable thumbnail for access to the full-size graphic.

All pages shall be designed for 800 x 600 screen resolution (see Readability section above), 28.8 kbps modem access speed, and 15" monitor size. Where necessary it shall be assumed that the development platform is an IBM-compatible PC.

### 3.8. Page submission

Page submissions should be in either HTML or Microsoft Office® format to reduce conversion time and effort. Each page submitted should include a complete set of metadata about the page: the latest revision date of the content, the date by which the content should be reviewed, and the contact information for the page's steward. This metadata should go into a meta tag with the following format:

```
<META NAME="revisiondate" CONTENT="mm/dd/yy">  
<META NAME="reviewdate" CONTENT="mm/dd/yy">  
<META NAME="steward" CONTENT="John Smith, SSB, 301-555-9999">
```

Pages should also include keyword and subject tags to improve search performance.

```
<META NAME="keywords" CONTENT="keyword1 keyword2 keyword3">  
<META NAME="subject" CONTENT="subject summary">
```

Each page shall include a title tag to improve printability and traceability.

```
<TITLE> . . . document title goes here . . . </TITLE>
```

### **3.9. Security**

There is a department-level policy regarding public access web servers. They shall be separated from internal servers. This means that no websites may reside on servers that are on the USDA Intranet. Most security measures should be software-encoded as opposed to hardware level measures such as Internet Protocol (IP) address monitoring. Page developers are encouraged to work closely with the system administrators of the servers on which the pages reside.